

25 October 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Changes in National Intelligence Estimates on Soviet Long Range Striking Forces

1. Since August 1960, the USIB has produced six National Intelligence Estimates (including Memoranda to Holders) on current and future Soviet strengths in operational ICBM launchers. In general, all of these estimates have projected vigorous and continuing Soviet programs to develop and deploy ICBMs. We have estimated that these programs are long-term in nature, that they have high but not over-riding priority, and that they are geared to keep pace with technological change. At no time have we concluded that Soviet programs are designed to peak capabilities at some particular time, or that the Soviets are attempting to achieve the very high degree of superiority required to launch a deliberate attack on the West. The same broad trends have been forecast in all these estimates. We have anticipated a substantial growth in Soviet ICBM capabilities into the mid-1960's.

2. However, we have had to adjust our estimates on Soviet force levels as new and better evidence has been acquired. In some cases, the changes in our numerical estimates have been very large. Since the estimate of August 1960, we have sharply reduced our estimates of operational Soviet ICBM launchers. In the attached

Tables we have summarized for comparative purposes the quantitative estimates of the USIB on operational ICBM launchers, beginning with NIE 11-8-60, of August 1960,* and portrayed graphically part of these data with regard to estimates for a single mid-year (Mid-1963).

3. The estimates through June 1961 were made on the basis of extremely fragmentary evidence. New evidence on deployment activities and on R&D in second-generation ICBM systems subsequently led us to conclude that the Soviets cut back their first-generation program in favor of a later buildup with better ICBMs. We therefore reduced our estimate sharply in September 1961. Our estimate was increased somewhat in late 1962 because the USSR had apparently achieved exceptional success in overcoming R&D problems with its second-generation ICBMs (SS-7 and SS-8), and because the tempo of the deployment program had increased. In 1963 evidence indicated that the Soviets had encountered new difficulties; the SS-8 program was cut back, and deployment interrupted. The reduction in estimated numbers of operational launchers in NIE 11-8-63 reflects this evidence.

4. With the acquisition of a substantial body of good evidence since the summer of 1961, we now have more confidence in our estimates of Soviet long-range striking forces for the next year or so. As

*This and earlier estimates of Soviet ICBM force levels were based largely on gross capabilities to produce the missiles, construct launchers, and train crews. This resulted in projections of possible ICBM programs exceeding by far the actual Soviet efforts in this field, which became clearer when the evidential basis improved in 1961.

illustrated in the Tables, there is also a much greater measure of agreement among the members of the USIB in estimating Soviet force levels. We continue to expect, however, that there will be gaps in our evidence, that the evidence will leave room for differences of interpretation among the USIB members, and that new evidence will require further adjustments in our estimates, particularly for the far term. Estimates for periods beyond a year or so will continue to be based more on general considerations than on direct evidence, and will be subject to much greater uncertainty.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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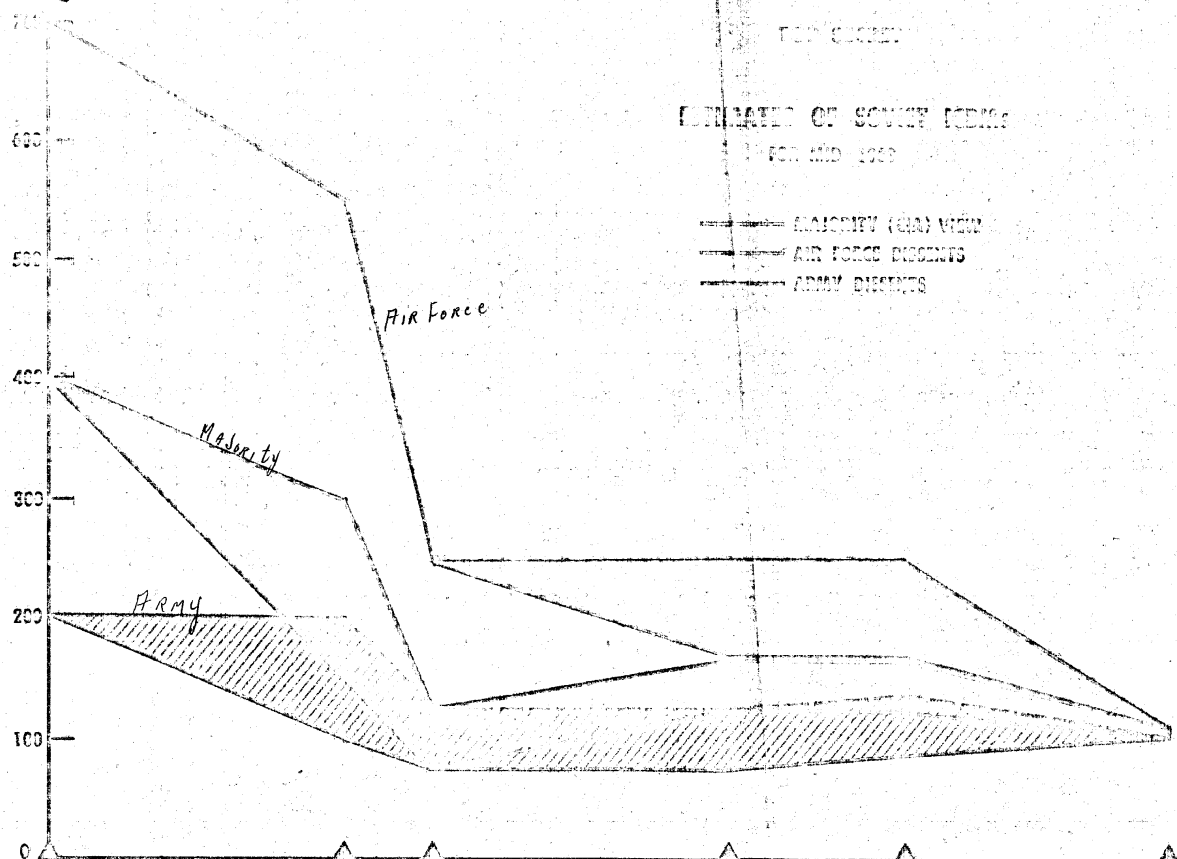
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ESTIMATES OF SOVIET POLICY

1 JUL 1963

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